h: Yao E-4 (no date) 1950 FT7 Yao FT7



Kanyamba, used to persuade Nyanja to help in the sacrificial rite. When Kapeni in turn fled to Mount Sochi from the Ngoni, and died there, the Yao addressed their offerings to him, not to Kanyamba.[1] The word *Mulungu* has sometimes been interpreted to mean Supreme Being, God, Creator, but among the Yao it seems not to have this personal connotation. It was used to describe the agent in any mysterious event,[2] or the place where the ancestor spirits (*mizimu*) were supposed to dwell. Daily life was full of acts of respect towards the ancestors, who were regarded as jealous of the living, and requiring constant propitiation.[3]

*Sorcery*

Accusations of witchcraft and measures for dealing with it play a dominant role in Yao social life. With certain exceptions nearly all diseases and deaths are thought to be caused by sorcery. The exceptional causes are: the hand of God, old age, the transgression of certain taboos, and battle wounds. If sorcery is suspected the relatives of the sick or dead man consult the *diviner* to *identify the offender*.

Yao (in common with the Maravi and many peoples of Central Africa) believe that sorcerers have a craving for human flesh, which they satisfy by killing with magic the victims of their malice and hatred. They acquire their magical powers by an apprenticeship, which might include incestuous relations with mother, sister, or mother-in-law, or sleeping on the grave of the mother for one night. The sorcerer then learns the incantations and finally demonstrates his power by killing a young relative by magic; he waits till the victim is buried, and then magically exhumes him for the secret feast with his fellow sorcerers. Each sorcerer who shares the flesh owes a debt to the one who procured the victim.

Charms are used as preventive measures against sorcery. When a *diviner* has diagnosed the cause of death as sorcery, retaliatory measures are taken. The headman of the village could either call in the *witchfinder* to identify the offender or he could call in the *diviner* to take action against all the sorcerers in the village. After the *diviner*, *Mahilidile*, had revealed the guilty ones, they were challenged to take the poison ordeal to prove their innocence. If they died, the *proof* and the punishment were simultaneously accomplished. If they survived, the *diviner* was held to have been at fault and they were acquitted. The witch doctor was supposed to entice sorcerers to the graveside, and slay them with magic more powerful than their own.

The diviner's findings are to-day checked by the poison ordeal administered to a chicken. A sorcerer detected in this way might be asked to provide medicine for the man whose sickness he had caused, or after a death he might be compelled to pay compensation. If the accused is a village headman, he will not be summoned before a chief, but his brother will take the villagers away from the sphere of his influence, or he may be chased away from the district. Accusations of sorcery follow certain regular lines. Nearly all accusations fall on relatives. Diviners are consulted by matrilineal relatives of the sick or dead person, and the man most usually accused is the brother of the accuser, or the husband of his sister. Witchcraft is therefore a manner of expressing the hostilities latent in these relations, which are, in the Yao social system, full of tension.

[1] Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, p. 70.
[2] Hastings, 1900.
[3] Henkel, 1925, pp. 14–15; Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, pp. 58–73, 204–13.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FTT Yao FTT



vomited human flesh.[1] They said that they had a strong headman and that they could trust him; he was a good headman without witchcraft. If he had been a sorcerer they would have kept scolding him until the next morning.

About two hours after sunrise the people gathered and started dancing. At about this time Cimombo was brought out of the hut and put in the grass shed which had been built for the occasion. This was the climax of the ceremony.[2] He sat on a chair in the grass shed with one of his two wives on either side. Makoka then started a chant, exhorting the visitors to come to throw pennies at Cimombo's feet. Some of the people there made speeches about the type of behaviour they would expect from him. Then Nyambi arrived from the court village in a rickshaw. When the noise had subsided he told the people that if they disobeyed Cimombo it meant that they disobeyed the chief. He emphasized the importance of the rank of the new headman. After the speech he presented 12*s.* to Cimombo which was received on his behalf by Ncimbo. Nyambi then left and the ceremony was over, but the people remained to dance and drink beer.

This description of the procedure following the 'coming out of the hut' is somewhat sketchy. The interaction of the headman and his villagers on this formal and ceremonial occasion is of great interest and importance. During the entire ceremony the headman adopts the pose which is appropriate for any Yao initiand. His hands are on his lap or on the arms of the chair and his head is bowed forward with eyes downcast. He neither speaks nor moves. His attendants, when necessary, wipe the sweat off his face or chase away the flies. The other occupants of the mat, who may be his wives, and sometimes his heir, adopt similar postures. In contrast to this, is the behaviour of the villagers who run about shouting wildly, the men discharging muzzle-loading guns, and women ululating in the typical Central African way.

Before the new headman comes out of the hut his mentors

[1] This is a test based on the witchlore of the Yao, who believe that sorcerers kill relatives with magic and then share out the flesh of their victims with fellow-sorcerers in ghoulish feasts.

[2] Called the 'coming out from the hut' (*kukupoka nyumba*). It is of course the first public appearance of the headman in his newly assumed status.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7



strike out with his adherents to found a new village. A sum of £6 or £7 is a considerable amount in everyday Yao life where the annual cash income of the average individual is not much more. The leader of a dissident group is prepared to forgo this wealth to get one foot on to the lowest rung of the political ladder—that is by becoming a village headman.

Obviously there is a great deal of sentiment attached to the idea of a united village. To the Yao way of thinking a village is broken by fighting or death, and these evils are linked by witchcraft beliefs. The association of death and the break-up of the village is brought out clearly by the funeral ablutions of villagers after the burial of one of their number. An important ingredient in the medicine with which the mourners wash themselves after the funeral, is *cikula*. It is the earth from a particular type of termitary which is usually about 12 to 18 inches high, upright and almost cylindrical. The crust is very brittle and it is comparatively easy to chip off a piece. When this is done a mass of internal chambers and passages is revealed. The soldier ants, unlike those of other species that retreat into the darkness of their passages as soon as they are exposed, come into the open daylight and swarm in confusion over the fractured termitary. When I questioned my informant about *cikula*, he kicked the crust off the top of one of the hills and said, 'See all the houses in the village of the ants? I have broken their village. So it is with death. It breaks the village.'

The Yao believe that death 'breaks the village' and that conflicts through sorcery lead to death. Therefore, conflicts are the real cause of village split. Hence differences must be settled immediately if the village is to persist, because if they last too long one of the aggrieved parties is sure to start using sorcery against its opponents. Those who do move away, go to a distant place because they believe that sorcery operates only where there is social interaction. But the fear of sorcery on the other hand is just as strong a force in maintaining the physical unity of the village. It is while the migration is being planned that sorcery is most likely to be used. This is particularly so if the village break is taking the form of a lineage split. This happened, for example, in Lupunje village.

Kalambo, the sister's son of Lupunje, wanted to leave the village and had gone to seek a suitable site. When he returned he found that

2: Mitchell E-5 (1948-1949) 1956 FT? Yao FT?



disease *ndaka*.[1] This disease, as we have seen, affects the sexually inactive when they are brought into contact with those who are sexually active. But the disease will only affect the members of the matrilineage of the errant person. For example, suppose a labour migrant is coming home from Southern Rhodesia and has, among other things, a few pounds of salt in his baggage for a gift to his relatives. Suppose also that while he is returning he has promiscuous intercourse. The salt becomes charged with sexual heat and if he gives it to any of his matrilineal relatives to cook with, they will contract this disease. He must therefore give the salt to members of another matrilineage, even if they live in the same village.

It is when the unity of the matrilineage is threatened, by either death or division, that its mystical value appears most clearly. When a member of the matrilineage dies the whole matrilineage is thrown into mourning and remains continent for three days. On the fourth day they perform a ritual purification and some members resume sexual relations, but the closest matrilineal relatives, such as the mother and uterine siblings, remain continent for the remainder of the mourning period, which is about 36 days.

It is tension within the lineage which is most closely attended by dire results. The most important reflex of this tension is accusations of sorcery. Good relationships among members of a matrilineage are adjured, mainly because friction opens the way to sorcerers. The Yao believe that sorcerers kill their matrilineal relatives so that they may share the flesh with other sorcerers. The sorcerer is fundamentally a wicked person and may kill any relative but is more likely to kill those whom he hates. Hence it is most important that relationships are kept amicable within a matrilineage for fear that sorcery ensues.

An interesting variation of the dangers of sorcery is the belief that sorcerers take the opportunity of squabbles within a matrilineage to kill one of the members. The rationale behind this is that the diviner's instruments are unable to detect the origin of the sorcery beyond the immediate cause. A diviner will indicate that the cause of death of, say, a child is sorcery, but that the witch is obscured behind the quarrelling words of some relative. Consequently, danger to a matrilineage ensues when one of its

[1] See Chap. V, p. 112.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7



613 members goes to an outsider and grumbles to him about the
6154 family squabbles[1] and quarrels. The outsider then takes the
578 opportunity of using this squabble to introduce his sorcery into
626 the lineage. The Yao greatly fear backbiting because of their dread of sorcery and none dreads it more than a village headman, a warden of a sanitary group,[2] or a person in the position of having to keep a matrilineage or section together. These people are continually adjuring the women under them—*for it is the women who are believed to be the main culprits*—not to fight among themselves; and if they do, not to take their complaints to an outsider but to the senior member of the matrilineage. The significance of this in relation to lineage unity is plain enough.

613 Apart from sorcery, strained relationships between members of
578 a matrilineage are believed to be dangerous for other reasons.
843 Malice may adversely affect people who are in mystically danger-
229 ous states. The most common of these states is pregnancy. If a woman has a quarrel with a matrilineage member while she is pregnant she is likely to have a difficult labour. The Yao say 'the womb has heard these bad words'. Another situation where malice or quarrelling will cause difficulties is in hunting. The luck of the chase is capricious and malice may easily bring bad fortune to an otherwise good hunter. For example, a successful hunter once gave each of his two sisters a piece of venison. Each complained that the other had been given the larger piece and quarrelled vehemently about it for weeks. The hunter now found that no game fell into his traps. He went to a diviner who indicated the quarrel of the sisters as the cause of his failure and told the hunter to get them to 'blow water' (*huperya*). He did this; good relationships were restored and his traps were filled once more.

613 These deleterious effects, like the curse, are connected in some
578 way with the ancestor spirits. This is sometimes expressed quite
769 clearly when a person is called upon to 'blow water'. A
755 mother who wishes to revoke a curse, a woman who wishes to recant her malice towards her matrilineal relative who is suffering in childbirth, or a man whose sister's son is ill supposedly because

[1] This is called *ntuwi*, which I have translated as 'backbiting'. This idea is extremely important, as we shall see later.

[2] i.e. those men who are responsible for their sisters and their descendants. See p. 145 ff.

2: Mitchell E-1 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7



[91] brother, is called *anyao mbumbu*, or 'the warden of the sorority-group'. As one would expect among a matrilineal people, the link between a man and his mother and sisters is strong. But it is the link with his sister that is strongest. She relies on him for protection, particularly when she becomes ill, but also in her [92] relationships with her husband. Her brother will be her junior marriage surety, and he will give the consent which will allow a man to marry her. Also a woman's brother will have to consult the diviner and find the medicines when she or her children [73] sicken. In times of distress, as, for example, if her crops have failed, she will appeal to her brother for help. Similarly the man is dependent on his sister in a number of subtle ways. He can always rely on her for hospitality, and is able to get a meal from her if he needs it. But his dependence on his sisters for prestige is much more important. The significance of this will emerge when we see the *mbumbu* organization in the light of the segmentation and fusion of the lineage. A man can only found a new village if he has the full support of his sisters. A sister also plays a most important rôle at the birth of his children. She represents him both at the first foetal-quickening ceremony and at the birth of his child, when she listens to the birth-pang confessions of his wife.[1]

At the same time the relations of sister and brother are restricted by customs. A man must never appear too familiar with his sister, especially in sexual matters. He may not, for example, [51] sleep in the same hut as she does; if she is away and he sleeps in her empty hut he must not make his bed in the place where she [138] usually sleeps. He may not even sit on her sleeping mat. Authentic cases of incest with a sister are extremely rare, whereas I recorded three or four cases of father-daughter incest while I was in the field. Supposed cases of brother-sister incest are [154] recounted and discussed widely. This is understandable because a man who is suspiciously familiar with his sister is suspected of being a sorcerer, since it is widely believed that a sorcerer usually obtains the power that he needs for the performance of his dire deeds by sleeping with his sister. The riddle of the initiands—'What is the sweetest fruit which may not be tasted?' Answer, 'Your sister'—neatly reflects the attitude of the Yao.

The close link of brother and sister is also reflected in the

[1] The significance of this is explained in Chap. VII, p. 185.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7



a definite pattern. Very frequently indeed an accusation of sorcery is involved.[1] This usually stimulates a dissatisfied warden to gather his dependants together and to move off to found a new village. Elsewhere I have set out in detail the typical events which precede a village break-up when the lineage splits after a man quarrels with his mother's younger sister's sons.[2] These splits are not always successful because the seniority of the older relative, especially if he is a headman of some standing, may serve to reunite the village, and the leader of the dissident group may be unable to maintain its independence. This is what happened in Mwambajila village.

Mwambajila is one of the more important village headmen in Jalasi's area. The tension between him and his mother's younger sister's son Mbwana Somsi reached a climax after a series of deaths among Mbwana Somsi's children. He consulted a diviner and found that Mwambajila was the sorcerer causing these deaths. Mbwana Somsi was very angry at this and told his sisters that they ought to leave the village and go to live in Liwonde's area, i.e. about 15 miles away. Eventually he persuaded them to move and they went to live on the *Masanje* river banks. But the deaths continued. The women now started to be worried because they had left Mwambajila's village

[1] The implications of this cannot be understood without some knowledge of Yao divining procedure. The type of divining is usually by gourd and object (*sakamba*). The diviner first of all establishes the reason for the visit, i.e. death, illness, theft, or whatever it is. He then expounds his gourd and throws into his hand a variety of symbolic objects. He builds a story round these objects, and finally pronounces that he sees some person whom he vaguely defines. The consultor is then asked to mention who this could be. Though sorcery is supposed to be practised mainly in order to get human flesh for ghoulish feasts, it is not believed to act haphazard. In other words, a sorcerer is supposed to select his victims for revenge as well as for meat. The selective processes at work, therefore, when the consultor seeks to reconcile the diviner's findings with his own suspicions, are that he should select someone who is obviously evil, i.e. from his point of view, one with whom he has been quarrelling, and he should appraise the possible motivation for sorcery. After he has made the selection the name is tested by the diviner and the consultor may later submit a chicken to the poison ordeal to test the diviner's findings.

This, of course, confirms Evans-Pritchard's analysis of Azande witchcraft and I here acknowledge my debt to him for stimulus both from his book and from the discussions we have had on the topic. I assume his analysis in my discussion. See Evans-Pritchard, E. E., *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, Clarendon Press (Oxford, 1937).

[2] In *Seven Tribes*. Case History II, 321.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT? Yao FT?



578 and that he could not understand who could be inducing them to
593 talk like this. He told them also that as far as he was concerned they
621 could report the case to whomsoever they wished. The women came out of the hut and went straight to Paweni who was the headman's younger brother. He told them to go back and to wait a while before they took further action.

578 After four days had passed the headman's sister who had fought
593 with the headman's wife, became ill. In the morning the sisters sent a message to Mponda but he did not come. They sent another
●759 message to Paweni who came and asked if they had told Mponda.
787 They said that they had, but he had refused to come. Paweni called James and Ajuru, the sister's sons of the headman, and told them that he would tell the headman that they were going to find out the cause of the illness. This they did. The diviner indicated that the headman had caused the illness by sorcery, because of the fight between his wife and sisters. Paweni tested the divination by giving a chicken some poison. It died, indicating that the divination was accurate. He took the chicken's head to Ngunga who was Mponda's perpetual mother's brother.

When Ngunga heard this he refused to believe it. However, he agreed to send for Mponda and to ask him about it. When he did so Mponda denied the accusation. Ngunga now produced the chicken's head and accused Mponda of being a liar. At that moment a child came to tell them that the woman was dead and the interview ended. They went to the funeral and the next morning they decided to have a post-mortem meeting (*mapelo*) in order to decide the cause of the death. Mitomoni, one of Nyambi's perpetual sons, represented the chief. Ngunga opened the discussion by telling the meeting that the woman had been killed by the headman because of the fight between his sisters and wife. Mitomoni asked how they knew this and Ngunga told of the divination and the poison ordeal. He then asked Mponda if he had heard what had been said and what he had to say. Mponda replied that he knew nothing of it. Ngunga said that Mponda was a bad man and that the others would leave him and he would have to live alone. Mitomoni told Paweni and Ngunga that they must not leave the village. Ngunga replied that it was impossible to stay there while Mponda was so bad. If the women stayed with him he would finish them all. Paweni collected 30 of the 40 huts that made up the village and took them away to Chikweo's area, a distance of about 15 miles. Those who stayed behind with Mponda were his 'children' and some unrelated people.

593 This case brings to the fore the position of the younger brother
578 as a constant challenge to his elder for the care of his sisters.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FTT Tao FTT



the arbitrators awarded 30s. compensation to be paid by Cilimba to Cikoja, less 5s. owing. This money was to be paid to Ayesi in compensation for the loss of her baby. Ayesi, however, refused to accept the money because she said she wanted to have her baby. The matter now became an intra-segment affair and Cikoja, Amida, Kanyenga and Kaifa (F36), the son of Ayesi, with Bt. Amina had a meeting on what to do. Ayesi was quite adamant about it. There was nothing to do but to drop the matter, and the state of tension between the segments remained as it was before.

The next incident occurred in 1943. Mpululu, the husband of Bt. Amina, had some goats. One day two of them strayed on to the verandah of Bt. Madi's hut. Bt. Madi (F70) was the daughter of Amina (F2) and a member of the senior lineage segment. One of the goats stood its way into a basket of flour that was lying under the verandah and started to eat it. Bt. Madi came out and picked up a log that was lying nearby and threw it at the goat. It broke the goat's leg and the goat had to be destroyed. The owner, Mpululu, who was watching at that moment immediately rebuked the woman. He went and reported the matter to Cikoja and he sent a message to Mpululu's marriage survey who sent back to say that they would meet at Chiwalo's hut the following morning. The arbitrator in the case finally decided that the correct action should have been to take the goat to the owner and to lay a complaint against him. As it was he had to award compensation of 30s. to be paid to the owner of the goat. Mpululu, however, refused to take the money. He argued that although the goat was his, so was the offender.[1] He said that he was afraid of sorcery so he would take a token amount of 3s. only. Cikoja gave him this.[2]

A few months later the eldest child of Bt. Bwana Isa (F16) suddenly fell ill and died.[3] Kanyenga, Kaifa and Mzuza went to the diviner. Kaifa, the son of Ayesi, went as the headman's representative. Kanyenga went as the warden of the sorority-group, i.e. the child's mother's brother. Mzuza was the marriage survey of the child's father. Kanyenga consulted the diviner who indicated that Kanyenga's mother Bt. Amina was responsible but that she was not a sorceress. Sorcery, he said, was introduced by an unknown person who was using Bt. Amina's grumbling as a screen. Kanyenga refused to accept the finding of the diviner, saying that his mother had never been 'caught'

[1] His wife's collateral sister's child he also calls 'my child'.

[2] Mpululu is a stranger in the village and in this situation Cikoja represents both segments to Mpululu, even though the senior segment is guilty.

[3] Sudden illness, called *chisesa* or 'the hammer', is believed to be without a doubt due to sorcery.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT? Yao FT?



by a diviner before. He went back and reported the matter to Cikoja who accepted the finding. Kanyenga, however, argued that the real sorcerer was using magic to confuse the diviner. After some argument Cikoja sent for the then senior living member of the matrilineage, Bt. Mkwinda (C6), who was living in Chulo district, for Mkanda, a perpetual brother, and for Cibwana Kawinga, his perpetual mother's brother. A big meeting was held at which all the important local headmen attended. The case was argued on the point whether Bt. Amina and her husband, who was implicated in the accusation, could be sorcerers. After some arguments the court decided that it was impossible for Bt. Amina to be a sorceress without Cikoja also being a sorcerer, so that the accusation now settled on Cikoja himself. The case was taken up to Chiwalo who refused to award compensation. He reviewed the various charges of sorcery that had been made in the village before and observed that after the death of one of the supposed sorcerers the village had lived peacefully. He deplored the new friction and warned that there was to be no migration from the village. He advised Cikoja to mollify his sisters if he could. Kanyenga, Cikoja's eldest sister's son, said that he did not think that it would be possible because the headman had virtually accused his sister of sorcery. Cibwana Kawinga now said that there was no question of whether it could be done or not. It simply had to be done.

About one month after this episode, Ajisa (F26), the last-born child of Bt. Amina, who was about 2½ years old, died after two days' illness. When he was obviously very ill Kanyenga left with Mpalula to call Amidu. They went first to wake Cikoja who in turn sent for Gwili (F4) to be his representative. Kanyenga went off to a diviner at daybreak without waiting for the father's marriage surety. The diviner indicated that there was tension in the lineage which was at the back of the child's illness. Eventually, he indicated that Bt. Ntalika (F3) was the cause of the illness and it harked back to the dispute over the sifting basket and the goat. The diviner prepared suitable medicine and the two went back to the sick child. They got back about 8.30 a.m. and found the people congregated at the hut. In the meantime, Cikoja had sent off another divining party, Amidu (F18) and Jauma (F7). Kanyenga prepared the medicine and gave it to the child. It seemed to be getting no better and before Amidu and Jauma returned Cikoja sent Kanyenga and Gwili out to divine again. Then Amidu and Jauma returned and indicated that the same person was responsible, and almost immediately afterward Kanyenga and Gwili came back with the same result. When Kanyenga heard this he went to Chiwalo and reported the matter. Chiwalo sent a messenger to call Cikoja, Bt. Ntalika and her eldest sister's son Cilimba (F1), who was the senior male member of the senior lineage

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7



613
578
759

segment. They were to go to Chiwale's hut the next morning. During the night the child Ajim died, and Chiwale remarked that Cikoja was bad at heart and that he surely killed his people like chickens.[1] Four days later after the funeral a meeting was held to decide the cause of death. The arbitrator and chief's representative was the local court assessor. The man's party opened the discussion saying, 'If Cikoja is tired of us he should tell us. To-day he is killing his child. We know that Mpalula[2] has begotten a sheep. The sheep pen is filled and when Cikoja wants to eat he surely eats there.'[3] The arbitrator said that Cikoja had done a shameful thing and that they should make up a divining party to find the cause of death. Kanyenga immediately denounced and said that they had divined three times with the same results. Further divination was a waste of money. He insisted that they called Cibwana Kawinga. The meeting broke up and Cibwana Kawinga was called for. He came a day or two later and the meeting was resumed. He said, 'Cikoja, you are evil.[4] You have found it impossible to keep the village. Now what are you going to do with your children? The man's party says that he is going to take Mpalula away. Your brothers say that they are going to take their mothers away. Now what do you say to this?' Cikoja had no reply to make. Chiwale then said that he would have to pay compensation to his sister. Kanyenga, however, said that they did not want money. They wanted to get away. Cibwana Kawinga here checked Kanyenga and told him that they would take Cikoja and give him a talking to, and instruct him on the traditional way of keeping a village together.[5] Chiwale accepted this settlement of Cibwana Kawinga and endorsed his action.

When they got back, Cilimba told Cikoja and Mbunde that he wanted to move out of the village because his 'mother' had been called a sorceress by his 'brother'. Cikoja was anxious to avoid further trouble and told his lineage members that he was going to build a hut for his second wife some distance from the village because his first wife did not get on with her. He put up a hut about half a mile away across the Nanzwece stream. Cilimba (F1) who was living virilocally, his mother Bt. Ntalika (E1), Bt. Mbwana (F2),

---

[1] This is a reference to the ghost-motif in Yao witchlore. Cikoja here, of course, is a symbol of the whole lineage, so that this imprecation is directed towards the whole lineage and not to Cikoja personally, as in the last dispute.

[2] The father of the dead child.

[3] Mpalula had begotten eleven children. This is another reference to the ghost-motif.

[4] *Undwe*—this word is also used to mean 'polluted'.

[5] *Kala nzuwe wakwe mwi*—'the building of a village of old'.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT? Yao FT?



Kauzi (F3), Bt. Madi (F10), Bt. Aliya (F11) and their children moved across the stream and built with Cikoja. One of Cikoja's wives stayed in the old village and the other moved across. Shortly after this Asimauma (F6), Cikoja's sister, decided that she would like to move across to be with the headman. She reported to Kanyenga who sent her to tell Cikoja. Cikoja in turn sent her to tell Amida. Eventually, Cikoja, Amida, Kanyenga and Salimu (D3) had a meeting about it. Neither Amida nor Kanyenga, nor Salimu, was enthusiastic, but they said she should follow her own wishes. She moved across with her children. Asimauma's arrival on the other side of the stream was greeted with some suspicion by Cilimba because she was a member of the junior lineage. However, Cikoja assured him that he wanted one of Asimauma's daughters to fetch water for him. Cilimba was satisfied with this explanation and accepted the situation as it was.

It was not easy, however, and there were continual quarrels between the children of Bt. Ntalika and those of Asimauma. The members of the junior segment in the old village also looked upon this arrangement with some suspicion. The friendship of Amega (F28), Asimauma's daughter, with Asubiya (F9), her mother's younger sister was particularly deprecated by the members of the junior segment. Asubiya was warned several times that this friendship could only lead to misery.[1]

In the meantime, Salimu (D3), who will be the next Cikoja and who was the senior lineage member in the old village site, undertook most of the duties of the headman in that section. He settled most of the minor cases and saw to the divining. However, he reported his doings to Cikoja who was still the village headman.

In 1948, another death took place and the tension became evident again. Bt. Ntalika's child died. Kauzi (F3) and Jauma (F7) went to the diviner, who revealed that Amega had gone to Salimu to grumble about what was going on in the other village, and Salimu had taken this opportunity of bewitching the child. Cikoja refused to accept this explanation and said that the diviner was a liar. When the body was being washed, a knife was found under the mat on which it was lying, and the story went around that a piece of flesh was taken out of the dead child's buttock.[2] Cikoja interpreted this as meaning that Bt. Ntalika herself had bewitched the child. He felt it unnecessary to call a funeral meeting. Shortly after this there was some friction between Amisa and her younger sister Asubiya, arising out of jealousy because of the difference in their harvests. Bt. Amisa was convinced

[1] This is based on the fear of backbiting. See p. 138.

[2] Once a person is dead the matrilineal relatives do not touch him. They leave the hut and the undertakers (*aŵilo*) wash the body and prepare it for burial. They reported this finding to Cikoja.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Tao FT7



that Asubiya in her jealousy had gone to grumble to Bt. Ntalika about this. Rajabu (F20) who had heard about this called Cikoja and they assembled Bt. Amina, Bt. Bwana Isa and Asubiya in Bt. Amina's hut, and spoke to them about the dangers of backbiting. Cikoja remonstrated with the women saying, 'I don't want to hear about this again. When you love people do not love people who are strangers. Do not talk behind people's backs and bring war in the knots of your body-cloths.'

A few weeks after this, in June 1948, Alewinda (F27), a 3½-year-old daughter of Asubiya, died. When her mother saw that the child was seriously ill she took her to her patrilateral relatives in Liwonde area. She had barely got there when the child died. The headman of the village sent a message back to Cikoja to tell him of the death. He in turn sent a message to Amidu and Rajabu and they went to the village to attend the funeral. After the first mourning feast three days after the funeral, Kaifa, the child's mother's elder sister's son, and Malewaga, representing the village in which the child had died, went to a diviner who indicated that the cause lay in the backbiting of Asubiya about Bt. Amina, but that the sorcerer was Bt. Ntalika. The tension now had reached almost breaking point and after about six months Bt. Ntalika moved out into Liwonde area without announcing that she was going.

At the end of December, Asubiya's son Selemu (F46), aged 4½, suddenly became ill one night. In the morning Amidu and Rajabu and Nkatawila (D20), who was the husband's marriage surety, went to a diviner. He indicated that the cause was a girls' initiation basket which Ayesi kept. This basket, the diviner said, kept losing its strength and it was only on the death of a close relative that it would regain power. They returned and when they got near the village they could hear the women keening. They agreed that the diviner was a liar and returned and got their money back. The body was buried on January 3rd, 1949. Asubiya now left the village without announcing her intention and went to complain to chief Kawinga. Cikoja in the meantime, noticing that Asubiya was not present at the funeral, sent out men to search for her. After two days Kawinga's chief court assessor, Masunda, brought Asubiya back to the village. He told Cikoja that he had cross-examined her and found that she said her elder sister was causing death because of her jealousy over the food. Masunda returned and some days later Kawinga wrote a letter to Cikoja telling him to come to the court village. This he did and was told to hold the mourning feast, but to take the people to the court village to hold the funeral meeting. There a divining party would be arranged and the cause of the death determined.

After the first funeral feast the people of Cikoja assembled at

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7



613 578 754 695

Kawinga's court village. Masunda reviewed the events leading up to the calling of the meeting and asked Cikoja to give his statement. Cikoja replied, 'You say I am finishing the people. I do not deny it. If the people are being finished by my sister, then I am finishing them.[1] You may speak what is in your hearts.' Asubiya now made her statement. After this, Bt. Amisa was called out. She denied knowing anything about the case. Masunda at this point was about to send the case back to Cikoja when Matosa, a second arbitrator, asked who the marriage sureties were. Amidu came forth as the woman's surety. Matosa asked him to tell the court about Asubiya's marriage relationships. Amidu then reviewed the history of Asubiya's pregnancies. He pointed out that the first child had died.[2] The second one also died. The diviner had indicated that she had broken a sexual taboo and the child had died from *ndaka* as a result. The third child was still alive. The fourth had died recently. The fifth was the one about whom there was a case that day. He recounted how they had gone to a diviner and how he had indicated that the cause of the death lay in the backbiting which the person herself had done. Masunda cross-questioned Amidu about the *ndaka* medicine that was given and assured himself the complainant was satisfied that the second child had died of *ndaka* and not sorcery. Masunda then called Salimu since the woman was living at the old village site under Salimu's charge. Salimu, who works as a tailor in an Indian store some miles away, said that he did not have a great knowledge of the case. Cikoja said he had nothing to say. Eventually, after some hours of cross-questioning, Masunda decided that a divining party must be made up and the results of the divination reported to the court. Bt. Amisa now stood up and said she was prepared to undergo the poison ordeal to prove that she was not a sorceress. She said that she would go with them to the diviner to find out the cause of the death of the child. Masunda said that they would leave the matter at that. At the village they would have to decide on a divining party and they would have to give poison to a chicken to make sure that the divination was correct. After that Cikoja would have to report the matter to Kawinga and the case would be re-opened. Nyenje was at the inquest and said to Cikoja that if they were not relatives he would have other words to say to him about this business. As it was he did not see what he had to rejoice about. Cikoja said that he did not know, but that Nyenje should ask the owner of the village. Surprised, Nyenje said, 'Who is that?' Cikoja indicated Salimu.

[1] Cikoja is talking as a representative of his lineage here.

[2] The first death in a family is never divined for, because the Yao say that if this is done, it 'would chase the father away'.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7



Salimu said that Cikoja ought not to speak like that because it only made things difficult.

Two days after this Cikoja called a meeting at Salimu's hut in order to choose a divining party. Eventually they chose Kanyenga, Asimama, Raisi and Musa. Musa was the witness for Kanyenga who represented the woman's party. Raisi represented the father's party, and Asimama went to be his witness. Cikoja gave them 5*s.* and they went to look for a diviner. Eventually they found one and Kanyenga opened the consultation. The diviner indicated that the cause of the death of the child was *litukula.*[1] The party paid him and looked for a place to sleep. The following day they sought another diviner. Kanyenga again consulted and was told that Bt. Ntalika and her son were sorcerers but that the mother herself was ill with *litukula.* Kanyenga rejected the *litukula* explanation and insisted on the sorcery of Bt. Ntalika and Cilimba. The diviner consulted again and said that the main cause of the death was the *litukula* and that the sorcery of Bt. Ntalika was added to the other. Asimama here insisted that the sorceress *in* reality was Bt. Amisa. The diviner rejected this. He said the best way to test the divination was to give poison to a chicken. The party was at a loss to know what to do. In two divinations, a *likango* was indicated twice, while sorcery was said to cloud the issue. They decided to give a chicken poison. They returned to Rajabu's hut in the village where he had married. Here they sent Rajabu to tell Salimu that they were about to test a chicken at the poison ordeal, but that he must not tell Cikoja. They gave two chickens poison, one for *litiksula* of the mother and one for the sorcery of Bt. Amisa. The *litukula* chicken died, indicating that Bt. Amisa was innocent. When Cikoja was told this he refused to believe it and sent them to poison another two chickens. The result was the same. He now decided that he would take the divination to a distant place and chose to go to Ngokwe chiefdom. Kanyenga led the divination party again. They consulted the diviner and after much testing and retesting the diviner decided that the sorcerers were Bt. Ntalika and Cilimba and that the *litukula* had nothing to do with it. He also specifically excluded Bt. Amisa. The diviner now told the father's two representatives to stay behind while the woman's representatives fetched Cikoja. When he came, the diviner revealed the result to him personally. Cikoja was at a loss what to do in this situation. Two divinations including poison tests had indicated that *likango* was the cause, a third and very exhaustive one had revealed Bt. Ntalika and her son. Neither had indicated Bt. Amisa.

[1] *Litukula* is a type of pimple (the generic term for which is *likango*) which, when it comes to a head and bursts, causes the death of the last-born child.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7



613 578 754 695 Eventually, in March, he decided to take the case up to Kawinga's court. Cikoja was not willing to accuse Bt. Ntalika and Cilimba publicly. Accordingly he went to Kawinga but he did not send for Bt. Ntalika. When Masunda, the court assessor, heard this he refused to handle the case and told Cikoja that Bt. Ntalika had to be brought to court so that they could hear her statement. Cikoja and his people came back to the village and nothing more was done about it. In April, Rajabu wrote a letter to Cikoja telling him that he wanted to report him to Kawinga and to bring a charge for compensation against him because he had falsely accused his mother of sorcery.

I left the field in June and do not know what the result was.

The series of events are extremely complex. I have given only a summary of them. Nevertheless, the main themes in the history are clear enough. We see Cikoja as the representative of the lineage of any order whatsoever. We find in particular the opposition of the two collateral brothers, Kanyenga and Cilimba. They are the representatives of the two lineage segments in this situation. There is seldom any doubt about the affiliation of these two personalities. Consistently in the accounts of the divinations each rejects the diviner's finding if it accuses a member of his lineage segment. Note that the divination seance itself becomes a field in which the opposition of the segments is expressed. Kanyenga continued consulting diviners until finally he got the answer he wanted. His opponents rejected these findings and eventually even discounted the chicken ordeal. The diviners' findings and the results of the poison ordeals, therefore, are bandied about between the opposed groups, and though the whole procedure of divination and accusations of sorcery is directed towards the extirpation of discordant elements in the community, in fact, it is only a facet of the underlying cause of the tension—the opposition of segments in an ever-segmenting lineage.

613 578 In addition to the structural opposition of Kanyenga and Cilimba there is a certain amount of tension among Cikoja's uterine sisters. Bt. Amisa, Asimama, Ayesi and Asubiya have all had children. Bt. Amisa is the senior and the relationships between her and any of the other sisters are difficult. In addition to this there is the tension between the generations seen in the attempts of the sons of Amisa to bring a compensation claim

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7



604 627 sister's son. This, however, is not common because matters such as these, the Yao feel, ought to be settled within the matrilineage, or at least among kinsmen. The more usual procedure is for the mother's brother to take his complaint to some senior matrilineal relative who may be a perpetual mother's brother of the mother's brother, as say Cibwana Kawinga is to Cikoja.[1] Or if the matrilineage is part of a village, the mother's brother may take his case to his village headman, who is as likely as not his perpetual father. The senior relatives have the force of authority and public opinion behind them and frequently some agreement can be reached at this level. Where this is not possible, say because the perpetual elder relative lives too far away, the mother's brother may take the sister's son to court and bring the sanction of the Native Authority's punishment upon him. This is very rare.

604 788 There is still a certain mystical sanction behind the mother's brother's control over his junior relatives. This is based on the curse, which in turn draws on the belief in common ancestor spirits. A mother's brother may say to a sister's son or other junior matrilineal relative: 'If you have never sucked from the breast of my sister, nothing dreadful will happen to you.'[2]

604 754 The fear of sorcery is another force which operates to control the wayward activities of a sister's sons. People in senior generations are usually looked upon as having particularly wide knowledge of potent medicines. Though a sister's son may sometimes use sorcery against his mother's brother, the reverse is believed to be more likely to happen. I have recorded elsewhere[3] the details of a case where a sister's son left a village, against his mother's brother's wishes, to find work in town. He subsequently met his death in an accident while trying to get the honey out of a wild bees' hive in a treetop. At home his death was attributed to the sorcery of his mother's brother whose will he had frustrated.

604 578 On the other hand the sister's sons, while bound by an ethical code to honour and respect their mother's brothers, find that in fact these stand in the way of their own personal ambitions. A man's heir is his sister's son and it is quite understandable that there should be some tension between a man and his heir. But

[1] See p. 132. [2] See Chap. VI, p. 133.
[3] 'A Note on the African Conception of Causality', 54–5.

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7



one of Malemya's men died, after giving birth to quintuplets, some thirty years ago. Deformed children are buried alive. A large number of children is always hoped for and where polygamy is practiced, some families are of considerable size, although the mortality among young children is very high. It is, of course, very difficult to state the child-bearing period among natives. It does not start so early as is commonly supposed, and I think the menopause is found within about the same limits as among Europeans.

*Death.* Natives of Nyasaland live to a good old age. That such is not the case I have found to be one of the many fallacious beliefs concerning natives which should be relegated to the realm of exploded theories, as I have pointed out elsewhere.[1]

Death in old age is recognised as a natural event but apart from this, all sickness and death were formerly and are still to a large extent looked upon as the result of the machinations of some person, an idea which forms the outstanding feature in their belief in witchcraft, *uswai*.[2]

Here I shall mention the ordinary customs in the case of death. During the last hours of a mortal illness, a man is tended by his wife or wives; the head wife sits constantly supporting his head on her lap or against her breast. A woman is similarly tended by her mother, sisters, and friends. As unconsciousness sets in and the extremities become cold, they say, "His spirit has gone and only the heart remains alive."

The native does not like the idea of lingering on and a man on his death-bed will say to his sons, "Now watch me that I die quickly." He may take medicine to help him over that time or he may give his sons instructions as to what to do. Should a man linger unconscious for a long time, friends will ask his sons, "Did he give you any instructions?" If he has done so, the sons will then carry them out. This perhaps consists of bathing themselves in medicines left by their father, while they stand on the roof of his house. Sometimes, the natives say of a lingering case, "Ah, perhaps he has eaten of a tortoise's heart!" knowing the phenomenon of the tortoise's heart and believing that by partaking of it, the same property can be conferred on the heart of a man.

When death is manifest, the body is covered with a cloth by a brother, a son, or some other person in attendance. The eyes are closed, the mouth shut, and at the present time, the body straightened out. This, however, is a recent practice copied from the Anyanja, Europeans, and Mohammedans.

News of the death must be sent to the chief, and a messenger goes to his village where the chief and his people sit in the village open space. He carries a fowl in his hand. The present of a single fowl always denotes bad tidings. One of the chief's men, seeing the stranger approach with the single fowl, will jump up and take the bird. He is joined by the others and they go away to the cross-roads where they kill the fowl, pluck it, cook it, and eat it. In the meantime, the messenger delivers his news to the chief who will produce from his house about eight yards of white calico; if the deceased has been a much respected

[1] Hugh S. Stannus, 'The life-span of negroes', (Lancet, April 11, 1914, p. 1053). [2] Vide infra, p. 366.

3: Stanmus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7



643 ivory by his own hunting parties or as a kind of tithe on other hunting expeditions. The ground tusk, i.e. the tusk on the side on which the elephant falls when killed, was the chief's share. In the same way, the hind leg on the ground side of any game animal killed was sent to the chief. He took a share of the spoils of war and most of his people yearly gave him either service in building houses, etc., or kind in the form of food-stuffs, but he enforced no service and levied no tax, except for the making of a new burial place.[1] New settlers in his village were expected to invite him to drink beer made with their first crops.

In return, he always provided cloth to invest the body of the dead. He also made presents at the time of *Unyago*.[2]

A chief's life, therefore, may not be "all beer and skittles," though he consumes a good deal of the former and a kind of skittles[3] was a favorite pastime of one of the Malemyas. A saying embodying this idea was used when pleading for a man who had [538] committed adultery with his chief's wife "one who carries a tortoise (on a string over his back) is likely to get his clothes soiled"; a man has to put up with the troubles his belongings bring him. So a chief must bear with his own people who do wrong.

643 Ample opportunity for exercising such forbearance was provided, since the chief was 692 formerly the adjudicator of all disputes and dispenser of justice in all crimes. The headman did the same in a smaller way but appeal could always be made to the chief. Cases were heard by the chief sitting in council. He and his headmen and elders would assemble in the village open space and here cases were stated, often at great length.

Each party to the case would employ some man well known for his powers of oratory as leading counsel. The speaker for the plaintiff would start proceedings by a recital of all the evidence he could collect. After him would follow innumerable speakers, whether actual witnesses or not, each telling as good a story as he could, and the defendant's case would then be put by his representatives. There was no cross-examination but at the end, a summary was made and judgment given. A chief often took the advice of some one of his old men whom he trusted.[4] The chief received no payment for his services, except in the case of murder; neither did the "counsel" receive anything for their efforts.

674 Crimes. Causing the death of a person by witch medicine, *usuzi*, was the most heinous [754] crime; a *mwavi* ordeal might be held, but if the offense was proved, burning was the punishment which usually followed.

[684] The offense second in gravity was adultery. This might be expiated by payment or by death, according to the circumstances under which it occurred; mutilation was often [696] performed in the case of a chief's wife. All death sentences with the exception of those

[1] Vide supra, p. 244. [2] Vide supra, pp. 248, 264. [3] Vide infra, p. 360.

[4] The old Malemya (Nahitumbo) has some very fine men among his counselors. Kamtapa and Chimpile, the latter renowned for his oratory, were his chief advisers in legal matters. Ndaleka, a slave, was his mentor in all personal and family affairs, while Chekasenga was in charge of all ceremonies and served with his assistant, Mpanje, as high priest on all occasions of intercession. Others acted as his emissaries, such as Mkopiti who always went on any missions to the Angoni, among whom he was known as Ndonjira.

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7



and uncles as well. I am inclined to believe that the words primarily refer to a person's maternal and paternal relatives whose children bear the relationship of *wanke* to the person. A strange point, however, crops up, namely, that the paternal aunts are called *atati* (*atati wakungwe*) and their husbands *atati* again. 601

An elder brother is *akulu*, his younger brother *mpwakwe*, a sister *mlumbu*, *mlumbu wamandi* and *mlumbu wakulungwe*, younger and elder sister.

Disease. Apart from old age, the native recognises in all illness and death the hand of an enemy or the result of transgression of some custom: some one has made medicine against him, or he or some one else has broken a custom founded on superstition which is visited on his head. These ideas are so deeply rooted in the native mind that it is with difficulty any appropriate treatment will be received. They rely, rather, on some medicine-man to cure them by medicine more powerful than that made against them. Even an ordinary accident or an attack of pneumonia is accounted for in this way. 753 754 164

The names given in speaking of sicknesses are, of course, applied rather to symptoms, but in some cases where the symptom named is pathognomic of a disease, the word practically stands for the disease. The word used may imply the supposed cause or refer to a resemblance to some object, or again simply state the part affected; thus *chitumbo* (the belly) meaning stomach ache, *meso* (eyes), conjunctivitis, etc.

The following words most of which are found in the Reverend Dr. Hetherwick's *Yao Language*, give some idea of the Yao native's conception of disease. The sense which the above authority gives is not always quite the same as I would venture to give. I shall not enter into the question of the diseases as such but only in so far as they bear on customs, etc.

The word *chiluulo* signifies any disease or illness; *chilopa* and *chipindupindu* refer to epidemic diseases; the former refers to a disease of fowls and dogs characterised by wheezing and hence is occasionally used for bronchitis in man. *Chipindupindu* refers to a series of deaths from a cause unknown to the natives. The word *chaola*, which Hetherwick gives as meaning a plague, rather means arrow poison, I think. 164 753 192

*Chombolo:* a liver disease of fowls.

*Chipapo:* a congenital deformity of any kind (*kupapwa* = to be born with).

*Chitweeme:* a patch of white hair on the scalp of congenital origin.

*Chitwisani* (a cousin): the word used for a birth-mark or freckle; helical fistula is also included. Children examine each other to see how many "cousins" each has; anyone with none is made fun of.

*Chinduudumuli* (*tundumula* = a big lump): a hunchback.

*Chiwalulo* (*ku-walula* = to split): a "splitting" headache, or more commonly, medicine by means of which the possessor can inflict pain or death.

*Chinj'alang'ala:* a localised pain in the head.

*Chinyungunyungu:* giddiness.

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7



Strophanthus is specially reserved for poisoning arrows and it is doubtful if it is ever given by mouth; *Kombe* is the name used in this country, but there are two species of strophanthus in Nyasaland, *Strophanthus kombe* and *Strophanthus courmonti*. The seeds and bark are used and, less commonly, the root. They are mixed with the roots of a shrub called *Nchanimba*, pounded together and boiled, and the liquid used to anoint the arrows. The use of poisoned arrows is a Manyanja custom adopted to some extent by the Yao.

A number of poisons are also employed in catching fish, *Ngunga* and *Mtutu* being the most common, also *Komanimbile Ngochi* (*Nkodzi*, Chin.), and *Chinyenye*.

Witchcraft. In my article on the Anyanja,[1] reference is made to witchcraft and *mfiti*. Beside the Nyanja *mfiti* or the Yao *mauwi*, all tribes as far as I know in Nyasaland have firmly fixed among their beliefs, the conception of the supernatural human-flesh eater. It is a little difficult to define the term *mfiti* or *mauwi*, as it has come to have the somewhat generalised sense of one who practices witchcraft, but the original meaning is defined by Scott,[2] a person who has acquired the knowledge of occult medicine by which he can kill his fellow men; "what makes the power so dreaded is not that the *mfiti* exercises this power for reasons of spite but (as is supposed), to eat the body of his victim." It is at once interesting to note that the word *mfiti* does not belong, according to Scott, to the personal class of nouns but to the *yo-as* class, which seems to imply that they believe a *mfiti* to be something outside the idea of a person. Among the Anyanja in Zomba district, however, the word belongs to the first class of nouns (the personal class) as also does *mauwi* in Chiyao.

The natives believe that any man in a village may be a *mfiti* or it might be more correct to say, is capable of changing into a *mfiti*. *Ufiti* is the state of being a *mfiti*; in Chiyao, *uauwi*.

As I have pointed out under *Diseases*, practically all illness and death are thought to be due to the machinations of some person or persons. The inciting motive which may cause a man to compass the death of another may be spite, revenge, etc., or the desires of *uauwi*. Until recent years, when the Government legislated to put down witchcraft, the charges of *uauwi* were everyday occurrences. Whether or not the prevalence of the idea of cannibalism has any substance in correspondingly frequent practice has never been and now probably never will be surely proved. Duff Macdonald believes it to be so.[3] It is true that native graves have been and are still rifled and that the graves of some Europeans have been so opened in the past, as I have learned from eyewitnesses. It seems probable that the graves were tampered with by natives with the object of removing the human remains, possibly to be eaten or to obtain portions of the body to use as charms. Mr. L. T. Moggridge,

[1] 'Notes on some tribes of British Central Africa,' op. cit., p. 202.
[2] Op. cit., p. 345.
[3] Africana, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 213-214.

754 Resident Magistrate at Blantyre, told me of a case where the grave of a well-known European hunter was opened and his trigger finger removed, the reason being obvious. The same thing is said to have occurred in regard to the heart of a brave man. In the former case the finger was probably worn as a charm; in the latter, the heart partly eaten and partly made into medicine. I have found human fingers and skulls among the outfits of witch-doctors. Such practices seem akin to those of cannibalistic societies found in other parts of Africa.

754 266 [575] The natives insist that *wasusi* are banded together in some sort of society. There are numerous discrepancies in the evidence brought forward about *wasusi*, but such would necessarily arise and they do not, therefore, disprove the general belief in the actuality of *wasusi*. Be that as it may, it seems probable that though there may be little or no cannibalism at the present day, the beliefs about *wasusi* have arisen in consequence of common 266 cannibalistic practices in the past. There are individual cases of cannibalism well known and one has only to call to mind that of Kamtukule of Malemya's village. This man more or less openly killed and ate a number of people. On one occasion after a fight, he was seen looking over the dead bodies of the slain foes and in answer to an enquirer, he denied that he wanted any spoils but said he was just marking the bodies, "that would be his share." Later on, his own son, who tells the story, brought an Angoni man into the village who wished to settle under Malemya. It was evening, so he was introduced into his father's (Kamtukule's) house where Kamtukule gave him food and later a mat on which to sleep, the son meanwhile having gone to a beer drinking. In the morning, he returned to take his Angoni friend to the chief, but his father said he had gone away. Entering the hut, however, the son came upon the Angoni's snuff-box, and said to his father, "No Angoni would go away and leave his snuff-box." But the father said, "Well, he has gone." The lad being suspicious again went into the hut and found the place where the Angoni had been sleeping drenched with blood. Going out again, he noticed blood dripping through the bottom of Kamtukule's grain-store and looking inside, he found the body.

This man Kamtukule was a great friend of the reigning Malemya's headwife, Kung'ando; after the death of Malemya and after his wives had passed to the present Malemya, circumstances arose in the village which cast suspicion on Kamtukule and the woman. One of two brothers was ill and, it appeared afterwards, that the woman had said to Kamtukule, "Won't you finish him off?" It is supposed that Kamtukule thought she meant the brother who was not sick; for it so happened that both died the same night. It was supposed they were killed in order that Kamtukule and the woman, his friend, might eat them. Malemya had the woman turned out of the village. She now lives near Zomba and has once come under my care. The man, who was also turned out, took up his abode near a highway where he is reported to have killed several Angoni porters whom he said he preferred, because "being travellers far away from their homes, no one would bother about them."

3: Stanmus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7



The father of one of my servants helped to clear out the remains of a body from his grain store on one occasion and shortly afterwards, it is supposed that his own sons who had said they could not allow it to go on any longer, employed some one to kill him, as he was found, one day, with his head smashed in. There are, I believe, a number of similar cases known.

A person is supposed to gain the powers of *usuwi* by procuring medicine from some one willing to sell his secrets at a price, and by performing certain rites usually connected with his method of bathing. It is said that "such and such a one takes his bath on the top of an ant hill" or "on the roof of his house by moonlight." The usual initiation into *usuwi* is a long business, the individual being successively initiated into all the various practices of *ulwesa*, the supernatural. Medicines are made from a still-born child, from various plants, from the hyaena, etc., and used for preparing the individual in the new science. He is introduced to the hyaena, the fox, etc. It is also asserted that a man may acquire supernatural powers by having sexual intercourse with a near relative, a sister or mother. I have had pointed out to me an old man who is said to have wished thus to acquire power but the women refused and he has been a laughing-stock ever since.

On one occasion, a man related to me the pathetic life story of his attempt to find his favorite sister who, like himself, had been taken away to the coast as a slave. In desperation he has adopted the above procedure to try to gain supernatural powers to help him but without result. It would therefore seem to be a method not particularly associated with *usuwi*.

The *msuwi* is supposed to bring about the death of his victim not by administering poison or other such direct means, but by the more subtle mode of making medicine "against" him. When the victim has succumbed and is in due course buried, the *msuwi* arrives at the grave to secure that for which he has been working. To the *msuwi* is attributed the power of making himself invisible, and of taking the form of an animal; owing to the carrion-eating habits of the hyaena, this animal form is most commonly taken. Other animal forms which are associated with the *msuwi* are the leopard, the fox, and the owl, all night-going animals. The Yao say, "The cry of the fox (jackal) is heard at night because he associates with *usuwi* doings."

Arrived at the grave after sunset, the *msuwi* blows his horn, the horn of a small antelope, to call his brethren; a fire with a blue flame is made by the grave and around it they dance, or the grave may be illuminated by blue flame without a visible fire. The *msuwi* calls upon the deceased to rise from the grave, addressing him by the name he bore before he was initiated, i.e. his child-name. Obeying the summons, the dead man rises to the surface of the ground, though how he comes out is not quite clear — "the hole may be ever so small." The risen dead is then killed again by magic medicine and his body divided to be eaten by the congregation of *usuwi*. It is said that the skull is made into a gourd, the eyes are used as beads, and the ribs formed into a girdle.

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7



754 A *masui* may be met with under different circumstances. An educated native told me of his experience one night when riding a bicycle back to a township where he was employed. Coming along a smooth-hoed path with his lamp alight, he became aware of the presence of something in the bush in front and at the side of him. Suddenly his lamp was smashed and he was left in darkness, while something pushed him over so hard that he fell off his cycle. Picking himself up, he started to wheel his cycle on, when there appeared on the path in front, figures who, rubbing their hands together to produce a phosphorescent glow, held them up in front of the boy's face. He was, however, not molested further, and coming to a group of huts he knew, he went in and made inquiries as to the cause of his experiences and was promptly told that there was a man living in a hut near the spot on the path where they had occurred who was supposed to be *masui*. Such a story is given for what it is worth. The boy was about twenty-two years old, a highly educated native with an intelligent appreciation of the worth of superstition.

Some *wasui* demonstrations can have no object but to strike terror and keep up the prestige of the *masui* class. Mr. Moggridge wrote me, "A boy of mine was certainly attacked and squeezed about the neck by a man whom he described as naked, huge, and slightly luminous, on the road at the back of my house in Blantyre. The boy was strolling up and down in the dusk and had nothing about him to provoke robbery; he was almost choked before he managed to let out a yell which determined his assailant to let him go. He was not a local boy and no theory of personal spite was supportable. I thought and still think that the motive was to show that even the Resident's servant twenty yards from the Resident's house was not safe from *usui*." It seems possible that some natives with intent to rob had pretended to be *wasui* but recognising that their victim was likely to cause trouble, they went no further.

[824] It is said that the phosphorescence is produced by rubbing in the hands two vegetable substances from local trees and that this is the method the *wasui* adopt to announce their presence.

754 - 695 **Poison Ordeal.** As I have said above, when anyone sickens or dies, the illness or death is likely to be considered the work of some one who is *masui*, and action will be taken by the relatives to find him out. The proceedings in such a case where witchcraft is suspected will now be briefly sketched; though I give an account of a case from beginning to end as if it occurred at the present time, it must be understood that the giving of *mwai*, the ordeal poison, is now much less common than formerly. A man becomes ill in some village and does not get better, so the caster-of-lots is consulted. The sick man's relatives or friends go to the [787] lot-caster and approach the subject indirectly by asking him his advice about a number of imaginary cases; they may say, "Things have been stolen from our house." The lots are cast and the caster replies, "No, you have not come to see me about that." This may go on for hours before the facts of the case proper are mentioned to him. Finally, they tell him that one of their relatives is ill in the village, the lots are consulted and advice is given

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7



as to procuring medicine for him from a medicine-man. If the caster of lots is suspicious that some one has caused the illness, he will at the same time add, "Let so and so pray," mentioning the name of the man whom he suspects. Following the advice given, the medicine-man is consulted. He promises to get medicine for the sick man and goes into the forest to search for it. Having returned, he prepares his decoctions and having first partaken of a little himself, he gives it to his patient with further instructions. The friends of the sick man having returned to the village, indirectly ask the man on whom suspicion has been cast to pray for the sick man saying, "He is covered by some spirit." The man prays, sometimes using *mlepesi* and beginning *chonde! chonde!* "please! please!" and goes on to ask *Mlungu* to take away the spirit which has covered the sick man, adding that he himself is innocent of any ill doing against the man and that any grudge he may have had against him is now forgotten.

If the sick man recovers, well and good, but should he die, there is more to be done. The morning following the burial, the relatives go to the chief and in answer to his inquiry of what they are going to do, they say they must again consult the caster-of-lots. They will choose some one who lives a long way off and is not cognisant of the death of their relative: those who go to him have not been shaved after the funeral. Much the same business is gone through as on the first occasion but, in the end, the caster-of-lots is told that they suspect some one unknown to have brought about the death of their relative. The names of all the possible persons are given, the lots cast in each case and, eventually, one is picked out as the guilty man; the caster-of-lots saying, "If I am not telling the truth, you can test my words by giving *mwai* (ordeal poison) to a fowl; if it does not die, come back and break up all my properties."

He may have gained information from his lots that the suspect is a man of power gained by some special rite, e.g. the midnight bath on the ant hill, in which case he will insist that the fowl poison-ordeal must take place on an ant hill or he will give other specific instructions. On the way back, the relatives will buy two fowls; *mwai* will be prepared by a boy who has not passed through his initiation ceremonies, and two of the party will be chosen as pleaders, one for the deceased, the other for the accused. One fowl is then selected to represent the accused and the poison administered according to the conditions laid down by the lot-thrower, while the two pleaders give injunctions to it, one saying, "You are guilty; you shall die"; the other, "You are innocent and you shall show your innocence by vomiting the poison and recovering." If the fowl dies, a third man cuts off its head, saying, "I am the burier of the dead." *Mwai* is then administered to the second fowl to ascertain whether any other persons are involved. The head of the first fowl is singed, stuck on a stick and carried back with the party towards their village. A little way outside, they halt in the bush, and send word to the headman that they are returning. He then comes out privately to see them, asking what has happened, and is told all the events in sequence.

754 695 One of the group is chosen to go in the morning and summon some one to appear on behalf of the accused man. He and the headman join the party in the bush when the whole of the case from the beginning of the deceased's illness, is again related, ending with the fowl test and dramatic statement of the name of the accused, whereupon the fowl's head on its stick is planted in the ground opposite to the man who has appeared for him as he squats listening to the story. The man who has been called to defend the accused, though the latter may have no particular claim on his kindness, is in honor bound to do his best. As the fowl's head is planted opposite him, he will shift quickly to one side, protesting the innocence of the accused. All then adjourn to the village to put the case before the chief. One of the men acts as prosecutor, again going through the whole case, calling witnesses and others to aid him in speaking. The accused is then defended by the man chosen for the purpose, assisted by others whom he asks to help him. They may speak for a week or more. The chief decides the case, and the result will be communicated to the defendant by his pleader.

If he is found guilty of causing the death of the deceased, he must pay the fine inflicted or if he has been accused actually of *usavi*, he may have to undergo, or may offer to undergo, the *mwavi* ordeal poison himself or the test may be made with a dog tied to the leg of the accused man. If the ordeal is satisfactory to the defendant, the man claims compensation for wrongful accusation. If he dies with *mwavi*, his relatives have to pay compensation for the crime he is thereby shown to have committed.

[692] If either party is dissatisfied with the chief's decision, recourse may be had to a hearing before another chief, the first being very glad to be rid of the case. The second gives judgment quickly. If the case goes on to a poison-ordeal, a day is fixed and the accused is taken out to some spot two or three miles from the village where a hut is built called *ndowo* (place of torture). Accompanied by the two pleaders, he remains here for several days. People from the village come out and attempts are made to make him confess any accomplices; beans are fried over a fire and when very hot are put into the accused's hands and his fists closed over them, or they are put in a cloth which is fastened round the perineum, or bamboo sticks are arranged one on either side of the head and tightened by a string.

The third day, natural undyed bark-cloth is obtained and men go out to fetch the *mwavi* poison, two men from each party, the prosecutors and the defendants. One man sent by the prosecutor has actually to take the bark from the tree, while the others look on to see fair play. The bark can only be taken from the east or west side of a tree; it may not be cut with a knife or axe or be pulled off, but must be cut with a stone and allowed to fall; only a piece which falls with the inner surface lying upwards is taken. Any of the party may carry it but they must on no account leave one another. Having returned, they hide the *mwavi*.

On the appointed day, the big drum is sounded and a crier goes round saying that everyone who wants to see so and so drink *mwavi* must go to the appointed place. Every large

3:Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7



village had its regular place of torture and *mwavi* drinking, two or three miles from the village. Those used by Malemya, the old Zomba chief, may still be seen. 754

A clear way is made two feet broad and fourteen feet long in the bush and here the accused takes up his position attended on either side by the two pleaders, the defending pleader on the right, the prosecuting on the left. Facing east or west or following the directions originally given by the caster-of-lots, that is, taking up the position in which the accused is supposed to take a midnight bath, or practice some rite under a tree or an ant hill, etc., he is given a decoction of *mwavi* to drink from a gourd. This decoction is made on the spot, the bark being pounded up on a stone by one of the prosecutors. The accused must have had no food that day. He then starts to walk up and down the short cleared path with the two men, one on either side of him, the one saying, "Now you have drunk *mwavi*, you shall die as you deserve; you did in So-and-So," the other denying the accusations, saying, "He shall vomit the poison." He is watched by the assembled crowd who note the various symptoms of which vomiting is the first and said to be the most characteristic. After this has gone on for some time, they watch for what is called the *nyongo* which is said to be "a ball of bile formed in the mouth and expelled by vomiting so that it bursts on reaching the ground but not before", followed often by a second ball, twenty minutes later. Should this be expelled, recovery may be expected, foreshadowed by clearing of the vision. If he recovers, he is indeed a wonderful man and is hailed on all sides. The women trill with their tongues and shout, and he is carried back in triumph; the defending pleader will swagger about and demand anything he wants for his client. 695

A fatal termination is characterised by little and non-forcible vomiting. Purging is common but said to be painless. Vision is affected and as time goes on, the spectators ask what he can see, "Do you see that over there?" indicating a hill. If he makes mistakes, then they say, "Ah, he is going to die!"

The poison may not take full effect for three or four hours. The end is ushered in by a last stage when the legs become weak; he staggers, then unable to stand any longer, falls to the ground dead, execrated by the onlookers who rush in and hurl stones upon the body, crushing it. The relatives take the mangled corpse and lay it on logs covered with grass in the bush. No other covering is permitted. It may be placed in a tree by people acting as *mwilo*. Burial is forbidden. [766]

In some cases *mwavi* used to be burned, not being given the chance of the poison trial. This took place at a recognised spot like *ndowo*. The last man to be burned by Malemya was Mtulula in 1892. Burning was also a punishment in some bad cases of murder. Such was the fate of Chingale. The man was put in a slave-stick, a pile of logs was built round him and then set on fire. [683]

**Witch-finder.** In addition to ordeal poison, another method of discovering a *mwavi* is by "smelling out." If a number of people have died in a certain village, the inhabitants may begin to think that there is a *mwavi* among them, and procure the services of a *mbiankila*. 754 695 791

3: Stanmus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7



754 695 791

*Mbiashila* is a Chinyanja word from *ku-bisa*, "to hide," referring to his custom of hiding in the village; the practise is originally Mang'anja, since adopted by the Yao. *Mbiashila* is often a woman and may be young.[1] She comes to stay in the village unknown to the people, lives in a watch house in the gardens and is said to go about at night when she is able to summon *wausi* persons from their houses. The fee for her services is paid beforehand. Later, the villagers are assembled and going round the company holding out flour in her hand, she calls upon So-and-So as the guilty man saying, "This is his 'night-name.'" The villagers all answer, "There is no one of that name in the village." She then goes round again and throwing the flour over the accused, utters his ordinary name and runs off into the bush, not to appear again. The accused may then offer to take *wausi* (ordeal poison) to prove his innocence or if it is a case of illness only and not death, he may be treated by a medicine man, the process being called *ku-lopolola*, "to take evil things out of."

A *wausi* man is sometimes said to renounce his old practices and may then be received into the company of *mbiashila*. A famous *mbiashila* near Zomba affirms that he used to be *wausi*. The mode of action of *mbiashila* varies greatly with different men; for some the ceremony is quite a minor matter; in other cases, it is an important affair.

**Witch-destroyer.** Where death is suspected to have resulted from *wausi*, steps may be taken immediately to catch and kill the *wausi*. For this purpose, the help of the *mundu juuseketela* is sought. *Ku-seketela* means "to break off the end of a stick"; it appears to be both a Chinyanja and a Chiyao word. The word refers to the practice of the professional witch-killer who is supposed to run a stick through the anus up the bowel of his victim and then break it off, leaving part inside. The *juuseketela* having been informed of the approaching funeral hides in the bush near the graveyard and watches the interment. After everyone has gone, he is free to put in operation that for which he has been called. The following *mudus operandi* is related of a celebrated *mundu juuseketela* called Angoni of Zomba. The water in which the corpse had been first washed was obtained and put in an earthenware dish. He also provided himself with a gourd containing medicines and some stones, and another gourd filled with poison made from crocodile gall to anoint the *seketela* sticks. He also had a small antelope's horn containing medicine which when smeared on the head rendered him invisible, together with the stalks of a species of millet called *sabulwe* which sheds its grains at a touch, and a whistle made from the horn of a small antelope, the *cribi*.

So provided, he proceeded to the grave, around which he drew a ring with medicine contained in still another horn. Within this circle, all was safe. This was followed by a square immediately around the grave with a stone from the gourd placed at each side, north, south, east and west. The plate of water was placed on top of the grave. The *mundu juuseketela* then anointed himself with the medicine which made him invisible to the *wausi*

[1] Cf. Sweet, op. cit., p. 288.

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7



and sitting within the circle, he blew his whistle which was irresistible to the *mwasi* man who was then induced to come out of his house. When he had reached the grave, the water was sprinkled over him by the *jusaketela* with the millet stalk from the dish on the grave, or he was struck with the gnu's tail; in either case, he fell to the ground senseless. He was then ready to be dealt with. The *sekatela* sticks, small bamboos filled with crocodile poison, were pushed up the anus and broken off to liberate the poison. Sticks might also be inserted behind the ear or in various other spots. The *mwasi* was then beaten to wake him up; he ran off to his own village and there, a little later, he sickened and died, telling no one the cause. After death, the *awilo* when preparing the corpse of the hitherto unsuspected *mwasi*, might find the end of the stick projecting from the anus or see the punctures elsewhere with the medicine adhering to them, and the man was revealed in his true colors.

At Mtwiche's village, there was a man called Liunga who professed to be able to extract the poison injected by the *jusaketela* by causing his patients to undergo a vapor bath and to drink certain decoctions. This man would never reveal the name of anyone who came to him for treatment but would brag that "trade was brisk." The symptoms of the mortal malady caused by the *sekatela* are said to be intestinal obstruction with tremendous distention of the abdomen (peritonitis).

Of this same village, a story is told which, if not true, at all events illustrates the sort of thing that is believed. As has been mentioned above, whenever the *jusaketela* blows his little horn, any *wasawi* will hear it and thinking it is one of their band calling, will go to meet him. A woman of this village told how she and her husband were sitting over the fire while the evening meal was cooking, when he suddenly jumped up and said he must go outside for a bit. She remonstrated and asked him to wait for his food, but he hurried off. Later he returned, complaining of feeling very ill; his belly swelled up and he died soon after. It was said that this man was very friendly with a woman named Abibi and that when he went out into the bush, he was heard calling in a low voice, "Is that you, Abibi?" When his body was examined, two punctures were found on the left side of the chest. It was supposed that it was Abibi he expected to meet and with her enjoy a cannibalistic repast, whereas it was a *jusaketela* who had called and killed him.

This brief outline of a case of sickness, suspicion of witchcraft, death, and the consultation with the caster-of-lots, the witch-finder, ordeal poison, death, and the catching of the cannibal witch, has been given as a more or less consecutive story in order that it may be most easily understood. Some further details concerning the lot-caster, witchcraft, etc., must be added.

**Lot-casting.** Medicine men who cast lots were at one time fairly plentiful and were consulted on many matters, often of small importance from a European point of view. Chief of all were questions of witchcraft. The *modus operandi* varied in different cases. In *wasawi* and other important matters, the medicine man always used the *chisungo* (divining in-

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7



**Witch-medicine.** The making of medicine against people has been shown to occupy an essential place in *usawi*, and it plays an important part in all occultism. So by insensible grades, the ordinary use of drugs in common diseases is reached, though it is probable that very much greater faith is placed in a packet of burnt roots put under the floor of the house than in the efficacy of any concoction taken by mouth.

There is a general belief that by medicine extra ability verging into supernatural power can be acquired. This power in a general sense is represented by the word *ukoma* and a man so possessed is spoken of as *mundu jwa kowala*. The desire for increased power may be a perfectly natural one, such as a desire for influence and popularity as a chief, or on the other hand, the power of *usawi* may be aimed at, or again, the knowledge of magic medicine for thieving or for any other practice. *Ukoma* is, therefore, a relative matter. The necessary medicine or initiation into the understanding of magic can be purchased from persons already practitioners, the honest herbalist merging by imperceptible degrees into the most criminal witch-doctor. A single practitioner may prescribe a charcoal dressing for an ulcer, exorcise an evil spirit by a vapor bath, sell medicine to enable the buyer to win a case at court, arrange medicine on a pathway to act as a selective love potion, or prescribe a drug to change a man into a lion.

Deserving of special mention are the people who thieve by the aid of medicine which they have either purchased or prepared themselves. Such a man is called *chitaka* and the medicine *mtela wa chitaka*. The active principle of this medicine is said to be prepared from the tail of a hyaena, an animal which is said to be able to enter a house where people are sleeping and kill and carry off the fowls without waking the occupants. The medicine is often carried in a hyaena's tail. The *chitaka* is supposed to approach the house he would rob and chewing some medicine in the mouth, gently blow towards it to put everyone to sleep. The door is supposed to unfasten itself and the thief is free to take what he wishes. He is even said to kill, cook, and eat food in the house while the inmates remain unconscious. A special characteristic of the *chitaka* is that whatever he lays his hands on in the house he must remove, though he does not want it, so that in the morning many unwieldy, useless objects may be found outside the hut.

There are many other magic medicines. One of these, *luunga*, if introduced into a village, will cause the illness and death of some inmate. Anyone handling the body of the sick man or the corpse after death, sickens and dies until the whole village is wiped out. There is a man serving a life sentence now at the Central Prison, Zomba, who was convicted of having caused the death of many people in a village in Angoniland. He is said cheerfully to have admitted the power of his medicine.

Medicine made from a cousin is supposed to be efficacious in various ways. The blood of a cousin is instilled into the ear for otorrhoea. Drinking the water which has been used by a cousin to wash his face relieves intestinal colic. Medicine is made from the hairs of the beard of a cousin or from an *ubilo* and used for chest trouble.

7: Hetherwick M-5 (ca. 1900) 1902 FT7 Yao FT7



774 123 they said, "was about to take away their shadows and they would die." In their mind the *liselo* was allied to the *chiwilili* or picture, and the removal of it to the photographic plate would mean the disease or death of the shadeless body.

123 753 774 As an instance of their faith in the close relationship of the *liselo* and the picture or shadow, I may relate the following incident. An influential Yao chief on Mount Zomba with whom I was on terms of intimate friendship for years, refused to allow himself to be photographed, fearing the consequences on his life. At last I was able to persuade him to give me a sitting, but on the sole condition that the picture was to be shown to none of his subjects but to be sent out of the country as soon as possible. He feared lest some ill-wisher might use it as a means towards his bewitchment. Some months afterwards the chief became seriously ill, and in the minds of his attendants his illness was attributed to some accident having befallen the photographic plate on which they believed the picture of their chief to be imprinted. If that negative had been broken in England, whither it had been sent, their chief's illness would be accounted for. Accordingly they appealed to the divining oracle, who, however, after consulting the "lota," assured them that the picture was intact, and that in consequence the disease must be ascribed to some other cause.

774 787 The *liselo* or soul is recognized as the chief agency in dreams. To dream is, in the Yao tongue, *kwanyamila masoko*, where *masoko* is the plural form of *liselo*. The *liselo* is supposed to go out and visit the scenes and persons it dreams about, and in turn is visited by the *masoko* of others, dead or living. Pains in the body on rising from sleep in the morning are usually attributed to such nocturnal visits, [753] while disease or pains of a severe type are ascribed to castigations by the whips of the *masoko* or more frequently of the witches who prowl around during the night watches.

774 828 Madness, idiocy and the ravings of delirium or disease are accounted for by a similar agency. The sufferers are *wa masoko*, they of the spirits, and a sudden fit of epilepsy or insanity is described as *gakamwile masoko*, the spirits have seized him. Such persons are usually regarded with awe, as living in close contact with the unseen, but no incantations or enchantments are ever used to expel the spirit in possession. Some native doctors are credited with a knowledge of certain [755] medicines which they say are effectual in such cases, but their application in no way differs from those employed in treating ordinary types of disease. Idiots and the insane are allowed to wander at will about the village, and only when violent symptoms show themselves as a danger to the community is any physical restraint put upon them.

754 The *masoko* are also recognized as the inspiring agencies in the ravings of the witch detective. This person, usually a woman, is called in to discover who is the guilty agent in cases of mysterious deaths or outbreak of an epidemic at a village. She arrives on the scene and takes up her abode for a few days previous to her actual demonstration. She mixes with the people, learns all the scandal and gossip of the community, and at night prowls about the houses searching for

7: Hetherwick M-5 (ca.1900) 1902 FT7 Yao FT7



evidence. On the appointed day she dances, *kupina masoka*, to dance the spirits, or *kuswesela*, to rave or prophesy, and in the ravings of the dance she calls out the name of some party who is afterwards accused of being the *mauri* or witch. Followed by a crowd of excited spectators she dances through the village spear in hand, stopping here and there to dig up charms or medicines which the supposed witch has buried in the ground as the instruments of his occult practices. It is only in cases of supposed special difficulty, or when the magnitude of the supposed crimes demands that special measures be adopted for their detection, that the services of such a witch detective are called in. In ordinary cases these appeals are made to the divining oracle who consults his "lota" as a means of discovering crimes of this nature.

Among the Yaos the human being is believed to be the sole possessor of a *liendo*. I have been unable to discover any trace of a theory that the *liendo* may pass into any animal or inanimate object and thus confer upon it the nature or power of a fetish. Such belief is cherished among the Angoni and Achewa tribes to the westward by Nyasa and the upper Shire River, and the intelligent Yao is aware of this, but he states that among his people no such belief exists. Even charms which have the effect of healing or warding off disease, or of protecting the wearer from war or wild beasts or other danger by land or water, are supposed to possess this power without any idea of their being possessed by a *liendo* or other spirit influence. The nearest approach to such a theory is in the case of certain powerful "doctors" who have obtained special medicine by means of which, at death, they can transform themselves into lions, leopards, crocodiles, etc. Lepers also are sometimes supposed to become hippopotami. But both of these cases must be regarded rather as transmutations of body than transmigrations of soul.

It will be thus seen that the nature of the human *liendo* is closely allied to that of the *masoka*, which are the inspiring agents in madness and in the ecstasy of prophecy or incantation. What the origin of these inspiring *masoka* is, or to whom they belonged when in bodily life, the Yao holds no theory. He is content to accept them as they are, *masoka ipepa*, "Just *masoka* and nothing more," as he says.

It is, however, when we follow the disembodied *liendo* after death and consider its position and power in the other world that we find ourselves in a region of higher spiritual activities.

In dreams or in fainting fits the *liendo* leaves the body but only to return to it with the awakening consciousness. At death, however, it leaves its earthly abode never to return. It is now spoken of as having gone to *malanga* or *mlanga*. This word, which lies at the basis of all Yao theories of the place of the soul after death, will be dealt with later on as regards its derivation and connections in the Bantu family of languages. In its actual use it bears two significations.

1. The word *malanga* is in the first instance applied to the human soul or *liendo* after death when it is considered as an inhabitant of the spirit world. Even in life a man, when he meets with any piece of good luck, will be heard to say, "It's my *malanga*," as if his soul had an influence in determining the character of his